

not ours, but we must make clear that our disagreements are not with them but with Vladimir Putin and his corrupt, autocratic regime.

Defending our elections isn't just about strong cyber measures, protecting the ballot box, and promoting better practices on social media. It is about having a foreign policy that clearly communicates our values and interests, one that leaves no room for debate over the openness of any American President to foreign interference. It is about a foreign policy that recognizes how the Kremlin's efforts to weaken democracy in Ukraine or in other European countries ultimately threatens democracy here in the United States. It is about a foreign policy that works with allies and partners, not one that denigrates them at every turn.

The intelligence community is getting better at detecting and guarding against interference, but we must remain vigilant. Russia and other foreign actors will continue to attack our democratic process. Their tactics may evolve, but their intentions remain the same, and we need to stay one step ahead of them.

The Biden administration is off to a good start in defending our democracy. As chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, I look forward to working together to advance policies that reflect America's time-honored democratic values both at home and abroad.

#### PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY

Madam President, parliamentary inquiry: Is there a time limit that we are in the midst of?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. We are in postclosure on the Becerra nomination. Each Senator has up to 1 hour.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Further parliamentary inquiry: Is there a limit on time divided by side or is the floor open regardless?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The floor is open to any Senator who seeks recognition.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Thank you.

#### NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Madam President, just switching very briefly, I want to urge my colleagues to join me in support of the nomination of Xavier Becerra to serve as Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

I consider Mr. Becerra a friend. I had the privilege of serving with him in the House of Representatives. In fact, we both came to Congress at the same time, a time, I might add, when there were far fewer Latinos elected to Federal office than we have today.

As a member of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Health, Mr. Becerra frequently spoke up for the many Americans left behind by our healthcare system: seniors facing sky-high prescription drug bills, patients with preexisting conditions, children, and the working poor.

Furthermore, he played an active role in the effort to pass the Affordable Care Act, a landmark law that since

2010 has changed the lives of millions of Americans in New Jersey and across the Nation for the better.

As California's attorney general, no one has fought harder to protect the Affordable Care Act than Xavier Becerra. And if confirmed to this position, no one will work harder to protect and improve access to healthcare than he will.

As the first Secretary of Health and Human Services of Latino descent, I know that Mr. Becerra will focus a great deal on addressing the health disparities that are harming so many lower income and minority communities nationwide, disparities we saw played out over the past year as COVID-19 claimed a disproportionate number of Black and Brown lives.

Mr. Becerra will also work to undo the damage wrought by the Trump administration to our healthcare system, from weakening nursing home standards that left seniors more vulnerable in this pandemic to allowing health insurers to, once again, sell shoddy, skimpy plans to consumers that failed to protect them from massive medical bills.

And, finally, I want to address some of the criticisms I have heard from my colleagues on the other side of the aisle regarding Mr. Becerra's qualifications. The notion that Mr. Becerra has no managerial experience is laughable, given that as California's attorney general, he has successfully led the second largest Justice Department in the Nation, second only to the U.S. Department of Justice.

And it is not lost on me that those questioning Mr. Becerra's credentials are the very same colleagues who claim that Congressman Tom Price's background as a doctor qualified him to lead an Agency that touches the lives of every single person in our great land. Well, he was a disaster and did not last a full year as Secretary of HHS. And the immediate past Secretary was a lawyer who did a good job in his pharmaceutical firm of dramatically pushing up insulin prices.

So I am confident that both Mr. Becerra's passion for healthcare issues, as demonstrated throughout his tenure in Congress, and his record as California's attorney general will serve him well as Secretary of Health and Human Services.

I urge my colleagues to support his nomination. He will lead this Agency with integrity and, most importantly, make the health of the American people his No. 1 priority.

With that, I yield the floor and thank my colleague from Ohio for indulging my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The senior Senator from Ohio.

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, I rise to speak in favor of Xavier Becerra, as Senator MENENDEZ just did.

Like Senator MENENDEZ, when Xavier and I came, we all were in the first class in 1992 together. I consider him a friend also and have admired the work

that he did as a Member of Congress, as attorney general, and the work that he will do at HHS.

In the middle of the worst health crisis of our lifetime, we need someone leading this Department who understands the importance of public health and who will work to build a stronger, more affordable healthcare system for the future. That is what Xavier Becerra will do.

He has the experience for this job. As Senator MENENDEZ pointed out, he ran the Nation's second largest law firm. He helped pass the Affordable Care Act, as a Member of the House, that expanded coverage to millions of Ohioans and tens of millions of Americans.

I think the Republican opposition, all partisan opposition, to Attorney General Becerra for Secretary of HHS, as Senator CASEY pointed out, is all about their opposition to the Affordable Care Act, their opposition to expansion of Medicaid. I heard one Senator after another say their State isn't treated right by Medicaid, but they didn't even expand Medicaid in many of those States.

As State attorney general, he took on tobacco companies, drug companies, opioid manufacturers, and polluters. That is another reason Republicans oppose him, because he took on their biggest contributors and their sponsors and the people they come to the Senate and fight for. That willingness to stand up to big drug companies is going to be more important than ever in the years ahead.

The cost of prescription drugs eats away at the budget of seniors and families in Cleveland and Akron and Mansfield and Youngstown and Dayton. I look forward to working with future Secretary Becerra to bring down those drug prices. I also hope we can work together to expand the Affordable Care Act and to make it work even better for the families.

We started this month, and the Presiding Officer from Wisconsin was a part of this, with the American Rescue Plan. People buying healthcare in the ACA exchanges are going to have lower premiums because of the rescue plan.

Mr. Becerra will work to undo the vast disparities in healthcare in our country. This pandemic has been the great revealer. It has shown how unequal access to care and pollution and biases in the system and so much else have hurt the health of Black and Brown Americans for generations.

We need to start with getting accurate data on how different communities have been hurt by this pandemic, something I have pushed for over the past year and something I know will be a priority to the new Secretary of Health and Human Services.

I urge my colleagues to join me in confirming him so he can work to help get every American vaccinated, to expand PPE and COVID testing supplies, and to build a stronger healthcare system for the future.